

REVISED STAP SCREENING TEMPLATE, OCTOBER 2022

GEF ID	11273
Project title	Mesoamerica Critical Forest Biome Integrated Program
Date of screen	01 June 2023
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1. Summary of STAP's views of the project

This is a strong proposal, which is based on solid foundations and evidence base. The proposed activities are well-described and integrated into a coherent framework that is underpinned by a robust theory of change and coherent suite of supporting arguments. The latter included a remarkable analysis of problems, barriers, drivers and root causes. There are some aspects that can be improved upon (e.g. description and elaboration of some aspects of the proposed innovation under component 3), and some corresponding recommendations that should be addressed in the context of the global co-ordination project and the national child projects (e.g. creating a register of stakeholders) but otherwise all aspects and key areas identified by STAP were well covered.

Note to STAP screeners: a summary of STAP's view of the project (not of the project itself), covering both strengths and weaknesses.

STAP's assessment*

- ✓ **Concur** - STAP acknowledges that the concept has scientific and technical merit
- Minor** - STAP has identified some scientific and technical points to be addressed in project design
- Major** - STAP has identified significant concerns to be addressed in project design

Please contact the STAP Secretariat if you would like to discuss.

2. Project rationale, and project description – are they sound?

See annex on STAP's screening guidelines.

This was a strong proposal, underpinned by a very good **rationale** for the program and followed by a well laid out project description. The background information on threats facing forests in the region was really detailed and supported by an impressive array of data and evidence, including a substantial number of academic references. One of the key strengths of the proposal was the balance between the description of regional and national issues and how these were combined to provide a coherent basis and convincing justification for the proposed activities.

The analysis of the **root causes** behind the threats and issues affecting the region was worthy of note as was the causal chain analysis provided, which links direct, underlying and root causes to problems and effects. The description of the proposed solutions, was built on a solid basis of logical reasoning and a clear understanding of the size and scope of the challenges affecting the region, relative to the limits and scope of the overall program. A good example of this was the description about the use and application of OECMs and how these can be used to conserve primary forests and sustain protected areas in the specific regional and national contexts. This thinking underpinned the reasoning that was used to position this intervention in the broader context of other government interventions, policies and regulations across the region and paint a realistic and believable picture of what this program can actually achieve.

As would be expected of a regional IP, there was a strong focus on **policy coherence** including the review and update of national, subnational and intersectoral policies, regulations and instruments. Outputs 1.3.1. and 1.3.2 propose the establishment of national and regional multi-sectoral platforms specifically to foster policy coherence

and the effective development of these platforms through the regional child project will be crucial to success of the IP.

The **baseline** was well-described and provided a good level of detail both at the regional and national levels for each of the countries covered by the program. The project objectives were well formulated and justified in relation to both the regional and national contexts of the countries covered by the program.

The **theory of change** was well-articulated and provided a substantial amount of detail about the proposed interventions, which suitably anchored to the four levers for system transformations defined in the GEF8 strategic positioning document. The components were reasonably well-described and provided a good level of additional granularity and detail that covered both outcome and output levels. Unfortunately, the diagram (Fig.5) was of low resolution and difficult to read, which meant that it was hard to get a good sense of the overall logic flow for the ToC.

The specific description of the proposed use and application of **innovation** as a lever for system transformation is rather generic and quite weak. However, the PFD included more detailed descriptions of innovative approaches under various activities, such as innovative financing, business models to support forest-friendly production, community-based forest restoration practices, and biodiversity monitoring systems. These innovations could provide high impact solutions for the program and for the GEF more generally, e.g. the development and implementation of OECMs administered by IPLCs, and novel incentives for nature-friendly activities.

Detailed information on knowledge management is limited. Component 4 provides a high level commitment to **knowledge management** and Outputs 4.2.1.-4.2.4 set out an intention for a knowledge platform; the identification and dissemination of lessons learned; south-south knowledge exchange and cooperation; and regional knowledge exchange workshops. These will form a good basis for effective knowledge management and will need to be evaluated in greater depth when the regional child project is developed.

The PFD included a section that identified the **key stakeholders** and provided a good overview of the actors operating at three levels: regional, national and local. The description of regional level actors was quite detailed, even though there appeared to be a disproportionate focus on Mexico vs all the other countries in the region. The description of actors at the national and local level was broader and more limited in the amount of actual detail but still quite informative. The lack of fine detail at the national and local levels is understandable given the very high number of organizations that should otherwise be listed. The proposal mentioned a more detailed list of national level stakeholders but we could not find this anywhere in the proposal or other supplementary documents.

Note: provide a general appraisal, asking whether relevant screening guideline questions have been addressed adequately – not all the questions will be relevant to all proposals; no need to comment on every question, only those needing more attention, noting any done very well, but ensure that all are considered. Comments should be helpful, evaluative, and qualitative, rather than yes/no.

3. Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions

1. It is recommended that a detailed **stakeholder register** of at least all the regional and national level actors is developed as part of the regional co-ordination project and maintained by the implementing agency.
2. It is important to properly identify and define the program elements where **innovative approaches** are going to be tested in order to design the regional and national child projects to ensure rigorous testing of ideas, identifying of pathways for scaling, and learning and sharing from innovations.
3. The Implementing agency should ensure that the KM plans are further articulated and developed during the design and roll-out of child projects. STAP would also recommend that a KM strategy for the whole IP is developed and that its design and implementation are included among the proposed outputs for the Regional Co-ordination (child) Project.

Note: number key points clearly and provide useful information or suggestions, including key literature where relevant. Completed screens should be no more than two or three pages in length.

*categories under review, subject to future revision

ANNEX: STAP'S SCREENING GUIDELINES

1. How well does the proposal explain the problem and issues to be addressed in the context of the **system** within which the problem sits and its drivers (e.g. population growth, economic development, climate change, sociocultural and political factors, and technological changes), including how the various components of the system interact?
2. Does the project indicate how **uncertain futures** could unfold (e.g. using simple **narratives**), based on an understanding of the trends and interactions between the key elements of the system and its drivers?
3. Does the project describe the **baseline** problem and how it may evolve in the future in the absence of the project; and then identify the outcomes that the project seeks to achieve, how these outcomes will change the baseline, and what the key **barriers** and **enablers** are to achieving those outcomes?
4. Are the project's **objectives** well formulated and justified in relation to this system context? Is there a convincing explanation as to **why this particular project** has been selected in preference to other options, in the light of how the future may unfold?
5. How well does the **theory of change** provide an "explicit account of how and why the proposed interventions would achieve their intended outcomes and goal, based on outlining a set of key causal pathways arising from the activities and outputs of the interventions and the assumptions underlying these causal connections".
 - Does the project logic show how the project would ensure that expected outcomes are **enduring** and resilient to possible future changes identified in question 2 above, and to the effects of any conflicting policies (see question 9 below).
 - Is the theory of change grounded on a solid scientific foundation, and is it aligned with current scientific knowledge?
 - Does it explicitly consider how any necessary **institutional and behavioral** changes are to be achieved?
 - Does the theory of change diagram convincingly show the overall project logic, including causal pathways and outcomes?
6. Are the project **components** (interventions and activities) identified in the theory of change each described in sufficient detail to discern the main thrust and basis (including scientific) of the proposed solutions, how they address the problem, their justification as a robust solution, and the critical assumptions and risks to achieving them?
7. How likely is the project to generate global environmental benefits which would not have accrued without the GEF project (**additionality**)?
8. Does the project convincingly identify the relevant **stakeholders**, and their anticipated roles and responsibilities? is there an adequate explanation of how stakeholders will contribute to the

development and implementation of the project, and how they will benefit from the project to ensure enduring global environmental benefits, e.g. through co-benefits?

9. Does the description adequately explain:

- how the project will build on prior investments and complement current investments, both GEF and non-GEF,
- how the project incorporates **lessons learned** from previous projects in the country and region, and more widely from projects addressing similar issues elsewhere; and
- how country policies that are contradictory to the intended outcomes of the project (identified in section C) will be addressed (**policy coherence**)?

10. How adequate is the project's approach to generating, managing and exchanging **knowledge**, and how will lessons learned be captured for adaptive management and for the benefit of future projects?

11. Innovation and transformation:

- If the project is intended to be **innovative**: to what degree is it innovative, how will this ambition be achieved, how will barriers and enablers be addressed, and how might scaling be achieved?
- If the project is intended to be **transformative**: how well do the project's objectives contribute to transformative change, and are they sufficient to contribute to enduring, transformational change at a sufficient scale to deliver a step improvement in one or more GEBs? Is the proposed logic to achieve the goal credible, addressing necessary changes in institutions, social or cultural norms? Are barriers and enablers to scaling be addressed? And how will enduring scaling be achieved?

12. Have **risks** to the project design and implementation been identified appropriately in the risk table in section B, and have suitable mitigation measures been incorporated? (NB: risks to the durability of project outcomes from future changes in drivers should have been reflected in the theory of change and in project design, not in this table.)